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THE ROUND TABLE

WE MUST NOT BE ENEMIES

"Themselves profess it to be idolatry to do so; which is a demonstration that their soul hath nothing in it that is idolatrical."—JEREMY TAYLOR.

All English teachers are divisible into two classes of idolaters: those who worship technique and those who worship inspiration. Each one of us supposes himself and his tribe to be sensibly religious; each perceives that the other tribe is superstitious. "They worship cold, dead formalism," say the inspirers sadly; and the formalists sorrowfully retort, "You pray to a mirage." Every number of the *Journal* clearly displays this pity for the other tribe, this pious wish that they might be converted. Every contributor is conscious that he must anticipate this accusation of false worship. The formalist always asserts that his "embodied regulations" are a mere machine, not a god; the inspirationalist always takes pains to admit that machinery would be useful if it were not idolized. You can infallibly tell by every opening paragraph—not excepting this one—which tribe the writer belongs to.

An illustration may be cited from the November issue. On p. 597 we read: "We assume that originality without literacy cannot in any place or under any circumstances be considered a meritorious quality." On p. 599 appears: "Must we go on giving the pupils exercises in punctuating by rule and continue to wonder why they do not see that they are not punctuating with intelligence? As well try to make a Christian of a church-goer without giving him an intelligent reason for his faith." The writers of the first quotation are clearly worshipers of form, for they frequently speak approvingly of punctuation exercises, of the difficulty of eradicating the comma fault, of accuracy, of adequate punctuation. They probably marvel at the naïve faith that children can be "induced" by some "spiritual" means to "see" when a sentence "demands a semicolon." The writer of the second quotation is assured that the other contributors bow down before a hideous graven image, reverencing heathenish rules. Such mistrust breeds war, and our English-teaching nation is so beset with difficulties that we ought not to engage in civil strife. Can't we get acquainted? Isn't it possible to see that we have a common purpose, that the other tribe is reasonable, that neither is idolatrous?

Suppose that the inspirer could journey to the study of some formalist. He would go in a missionary spirit, would speak persuasively. "Can't you see, my dear Rulist, that rules accomplish nothing? Carlyle knew nothing about them; Browning would have scorned them. I get along tolerably without them and teach my pupils to regard the spirit of sentence-structure. Is it not a better way to teach? Will you not give up your false gods?"

"Give up my gods?" exclaims the astonished formalist. "I have none. If you mean my rules, be assured that I never regarded them as better than so much disagreeable machinery. I dislike them as much as I do factories. I have simply been forced to employ them in order to secure that mechanical accuracy that our age demands. I would abolish mills and foundries if I could, for they are hideous. But civilization erects them. We have to tolerate them. For exactly the same reason I have to endure these mechanics of composition."

Thereupon Inspirer foresees a conversion. "You don't have to endure, Rulist. I don't use them. They are ugly idols. Give them up."

"Neither do I use them," answers the formalist. "Of course they don't do any good. There is nothing I so frequently say to my classes as 'Rules won't help you; I can't repeat them myself; few authors ever learn them.' No, sir; any rule is the merest heading for the exercises. Doing the actual work, and doing and doing and doing, is all that counts. Don't you have to work about the same way yourself? Honestly, now, don't you have to use dozens of illustrations and exhibit the examples hundreds of times? Surely you have no esoteric mode of conveying intuition to commonplace minds."

"Why, no, Rulist, there is no telepathy about my process. Of course I use examples and reiterate them. Perhaps I have misjudged your method. We seem to have a common conception. I am much relieved. But you must grant that idolaters exist. You know of teachers who force pupils to memorize a lot of rules that might as well be so much gibberish. Those people do kneel to idols."

The formalist ponders his reply. After some little interval he speaks. "I know the sad truth about reciting rules. Yes, these are hundreds of teachers that know no better. But that they worship—no, that is inconceivable. I have talked with some of them. They maintain as earnestly as we do that they reverence only one great power—the ability to write decently. They really think they are laying foundations for

such power; they have no respect for any other. We may mourn over their lack of judgment, but we cannot call them idolaters."

It is the inspirer's turn to pause. "I never thought of it that way," he confesses. "Perhaps they really are ignorantly worshiping the One Great Power. But you, Mr. Rulist, are encouraging them in error. When you parade your mechanics you drive such ignorant teachers to practice their abominations more vehemently than ever. You really incite them to offer up our children to Punctoch and Spellgon."

"Perhaps. But if so, they are stupid beyond all our power to show them common-sense. We nowhere speak of 'rules.' In our advice to schools we always insist that 'rules' accomplish nothing. Possibly we ought to proclaim in set terms, as the University of Wisconsin does, that 'the natural and habitual observance of these rules is the goal; but the goal cannot be reached by reciting these rules.' Yet doubtless there still exist, even in Wisconsin, teachers who have not understood the warning. We shall never be rid of them until principals and superintendents grow wiser. But they are not idolaters. Their religion is exactly the same as yours. Haven't you been a rash judge? Let me go farther and ask bluntly if you have not been something worse. Haven't you been misleading teachers into the abominations of sun-worship? That is a much more attractive cult for many a careless teacher than the plain gospel of duty and hard work which Dean Briggs preaches so movingly. Let me declare to you solemnly that a college has more to fear from those dazzled mystics than from mistaken machinists. We find every fall that a third of our Freshmen, taught to venerate literary charm, have had their eyesight almost destroyed. They have no vision for mundane semicolons, cannot focus their eyes so as to see the difference between one sentence and two sentences, cannot see that *replies* and *writing* matter much. If I could revise civilization according to personal convictions I should make the world indifferent to such petty formalities as *replies* and stiff collars and the use of forks. But civilization has me in its grip. I conform. I don't dare eat with my knife. Neither do I dare recommend a boy for a college diploma until he knows where one sentence ends and the next begins. And you, Mr. Inspirer, when you call mechanics idolaters, are inciting easy-going teachers to slovenly work. You really tempt us college instructors to call you a harmful Zoroastrian."

The inspirer knows better than to be indignant. He smiles cheerfully. "But of course you don't yield to such an absurd temptation."

"I do not. I realize what a chaos English is and I strive to be sympathetic. That effort is the first duty of all of us. Can't we quit calling each other idolaters? We are not enemies, but friends."

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A SECOND EXPERIMENT IN CORRECTING ENGLISH

The readers of the *English Journal* will no doubt recall the very excellent plan outlined by Miss Robey for correcting the everyday English of her pupils. At first I felt that she had stolen my fire, as the plan I have been following for the last two years has the same basic principle, namely, pupil-correction instead of teacher-correction; but the working out of the plan differs enough, I think, to warrant this contribution.

As in Miss Robey's scheme, the pupils jot down mistakes and at the end of the week put them on the board; but instead of one pupil in each division recording each week the mistakes of his mates in the classroom (that, at least, was my interpretation of Miss Robey's plan), each pupil of the Freshman class, about two hundred strong, is recording all the time, in a little book prepared for the purpose, any mistakes he hears one of the two hundred make, irrespective of division; and he is likewise recording these errors *wherever* he hears them—in the classroom, in the assembly room, on the street, in his friend's home, and even on the athletic field. A preliminary talk calling for good-natured co-operation makes the pupils willing to submit to the operation.

Each mistake, with the names of the maker and the recorder, as well as the corrected form, is written on a separate slip of paper and dropped into one of seven boxes, a box for each division. By consulting the typewritten lists appended to each box the pupil can see at a glance in which box to place his slip. At the end of the week a member of each division is appointed to assemble the mistakes made by each pupil and record them on the blackboard.

On the appointed day the pupils come into the room eagerly, albeit anxiously, and few are the sighs of relief, for nearly every name appears, though there is a constantly decreasing number of errors. Once in a while you will hear a pupil disown in an aggrieved tone an error attributed to him, but our plan of recording whole sentences usually obviates this. He remembers the time, the place, in fact the whole